NOTORIOUS 1950s EC COMICS!

TERROR

TALES FROM THE CRYPT®

NO. 24
JUNE

2.50
3.65
CANADA

FEATURING...

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

THE VAULT-KEEPER

THE OLD WITCH

JACK DAVIS

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! I SEE YOU'RE *HUNGRY* FOR *HORROR* AGAIN. WELL, REST ASSURED... YOUR *APPETITE* WILL BE *SATISFIED*. IN FACT, WHEN YOU'RE *THROUGH* WITH THIS *PUTRID PERIODICAL*, YOU WILL HAVE *LOST* YOUR APPETITE *ENTIRELY*. SO DON'T JUST STAND THERE *DROOLING*. *COME IN!* WELCOME ONCE MORE TO *THE CRYPT OF TERROR*. THIS IS YOUR *HOST* IN *HOWLS*, YOUR *NAUSEATING NARRATOR, THE CRYPT-KEEPER*, READY TO *CHILL YOUR SPINE* AND *CURDLE YOUR BLOOD* WITH THE *SPINE-TINGLING TALE OF TERROR* I CALL...

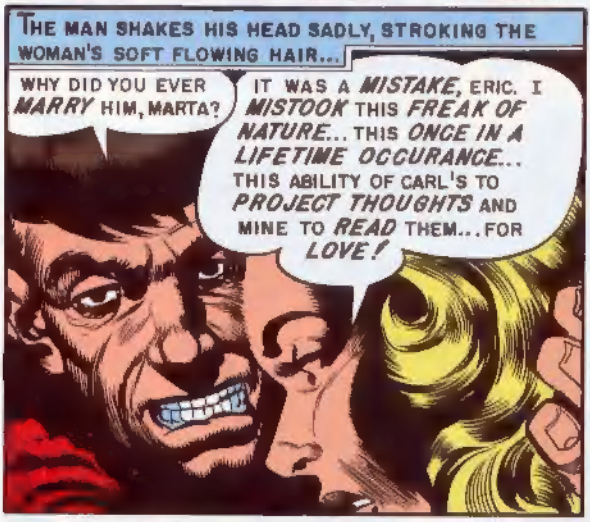
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

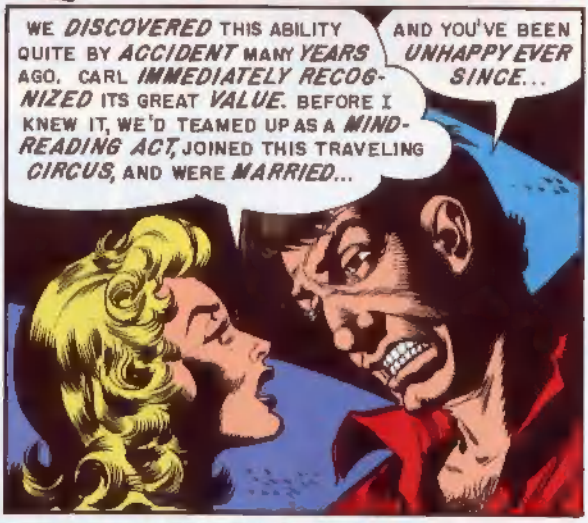
THE EVENING PERFORMANCE IS OVER AND THE CIRCUS GROUNDS ARE SILENT SAVE FOR THE FLAPPING OF CANVAS AND THE OCCASIONAL SNORT OF A CAGED ANIMAL. OVERHEAD, A COLD MOON ILLUMINATES THE MIDNIGHT LANDSCAPE. SUDDENLY, A SHADOWY FIGURE EMERGES FROM ONE OF THE DARKENED TENTS AND GLIDES QUIETLY ACROSS THE MIDWAY... WHISPERING...

THE WOMAN PEERS INTO THE SHADOWS, STRAINING TO SEE, HER HEART RACING. THE MAN STEPS INTO THE DIM COLD LIGHT, HIS ARMS EXTENDED. . .
OH, ERIC, DARLING...
MY DEAREST...

THEY EMBRACE...WARMLY... PASSIONATELY... HUNGRY LIPS... HOLDING CLOSE...
WHAT ABOUT CARL?
HE IS ASLEEP. HE DREAMS OF PARIS AND THE WOMEN HE HAS KNOWN...

THE MAN LOOKS INTO THE WOMAN'S EYES, GREY-GREEN IN THE MOONLIGHT.
BUT... YOU SAID YOU CAN ONLY READ THE THOUGHTS IN HIS MIND HE WANTS YOU TO READ!
HE TAUNTS ME, ERIC. HE HAS ALWAYS TAUNTED ME WITH THIS POWER HE HAS OVER ME!


THE MAN SHAKES HIS HEAD SADLY, STROKING THE WOMAN'S SOFT FLOWING HAIR...
WHY DID YOU EVER MARRY HIM, MARTA?
IT WAS A MISTAKE, ERIC. I MISTOOK THIS FREAK OF NATURE... THIS ONCE IN A LIFETIME OCCURANCE... THIS ABILITY OF CARL'S TO PROJECT THOUGHTS AND MINE TO READ THEM... FOR LOVE!


WE DISCOVERED THIS ABILITY QUITE BY ACCIDENT MANY YEARS AGO. CARL IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED ITS GREAT VALUE. BEFORE I KNEW IT, WE'D TEAMED UP AS A MIND-READING ACT, JOINED THIS TRAVELING CIRCUS, AND WERE MARRIED...
AND YOU'VE BEEN UNHAPPY EVER SINCE...

MISERABLE! I KNOW NOW THAT CARL NEVER LOVED ME. I WAS HIS SUBJECT... HIS THOUGHT-PROJECTION RECEIVER... A PIECE OF APPARATUS... NOTHING MORE. BUT NOW I KNOW WHAT REAL LOVE IS... NOW THAT I'VE MET YOU...
HE WOULD NEVER LET YOU GO... WOULD HE?

NEVER! IF I GO, HIS ACT GOES. HE'D NEVER GIVE ME A DIVORCE. THERE'S NO USE MY ASKING!
THEN WE WILL RUN AWAY... JOIN ANOTHER CIRCUS. I HAVE HAD MANY OFFERS. AN ANIMAL TRAINER IS IN GREAT DEMAND.

THE WIND SIGHS ACROSS THE CIRCUS GROUNDS, WHISPERS AROUND THE TENT ROPES, GASPS AGAINST THE CANVAS...CARRYING THE SIGHS, THE WHISPERS, THE GASPS OF THE LOVERS IN THE SHADOWS. AND IN HIS TENT, CARL STIRS UNEASILY...OPENS HIS EYES...

MARTA, I...I... MARTA? *MARTA?*

HER *BED!* IT IS *EMPTY!* WHERE COULD SHE *BE?*

CARL SLIPS ON A ROBE AND COMES OUT OF HIS TENT... OUT INTO THE WHISPERING, SIGHING, GASPING WIND...

VOICES! COMING FROM BEYOND THE *NEW ANIMAL TRAINER'S TENT...*

HIS VOICE...AND *MARTA'S!*

CARL MOVES THROUGH THE MOON-LIT NIGHT..HIS EYES BURNING LIKE HOT COALS...LISTENING...

...AND AT THE END OF THE MONTH WHEN I GET MY CHECK, WE WILL *LEAVE...YOU* AND *I...TOGETHER...*

OH, YES... YES...

...LISTENING TO THE EAGERNESS IN HIS WIFE'S VOICE...THE PASSION, THE HUNGER...

...BUT LET'S NOT *TALK* ANYMORE, ERIC, DARLING. *HOLD ME...CLOSE...*

SWEET MARTA...

...AND THEN, SLOWLY, HE RETURNS TO HIS TENT ONCE MORE. *HE HAS HEARD ENOUGH...*

SHE...SHE HAS FALLEN IN *LOVE* WITH HIM. SHE IS *LEAVING* ME. SHE... I...I MUST *STOP* HER!

BUT, *HOW...*

THE MOONLIGHT STREAMS THROUGH THE OPEN TENT-FLAP...FALLING ACROSS THE PRINT...BLACK LETTERS ON COLD WHITE...THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER...

WHAT'S *THIS!?* '*BODIES DISINTERRED AT LOCAL GRAVE YARD... TORN TO PIECES AS IF ATTACKED BY WILD BEAST!*'

OF COURSE! "*TORN TO PIECES BY WILD BEAST!*" *THAT'S* HOW I CAN STOP HER FROM LEAVING. *THAT'S IT!*

LATER, WHEN MARTA RETURNS FROM HER RENDEZVOUS, AND CRAWLS BACK INTO BED, CARL PRETENDS HE IS ASLEEP...
ONLY AFTER MARTA HAS SLIPPED OFF INTO DEEP SLUMBER, DOES CARL STIR...AND RISE...AND GO OUT OF THE TENT...
...AND CROSS DIRECTLY TO THE NEW ANIMAL TRAINER'S TENT WITH GUN IN HAND...
HUH? WHO'S THERE? WHO...
GET UP! AND DON'T MAKE A SOUND!
ERIC STUMBLES TO HIS FEET...
WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS, CARL? PUT DOWN THAT GUN...
SO YOU WERE GOING TO RUN OFF WITH MY WIFE, EH, ERIC?! WELL, WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT! MOVE!
CARL MOTIONS ERIC OUT OF THE TENT AND DOWN THE LONG SILENT MIDWAY TOWARD THE BIG-TOP...
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, CARL?
I, ERIC? I'M NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING! YOUR LION WILL DO THE WORK!
THEY CROSS THE TANBARK FLOOR OF THE BIG TOP UNTIL THEY COME TO THE LION CAGE. THE TAWNY BEAST PACES BACK AND FORTH HUNGRILY...
MY LION!?
YES, ERIC. I'M GOING TO PUT YOU IN THE CAGE WITH HIM... WITHOUT YOUR WHIP... WITHOUT ANYTHING... JUST YOU AND YOUR LION!
WITHOUT MY WHIP!? I'D BE HELPLESS...PARALYZED... UNABLE TO DEFEND MYSELF! FOR GOD'S SAKE, CARL! HAVE PITY!
PITY IS AN EMOTION BELONGING TO THE PITIFUL, ERIC. GET IN...
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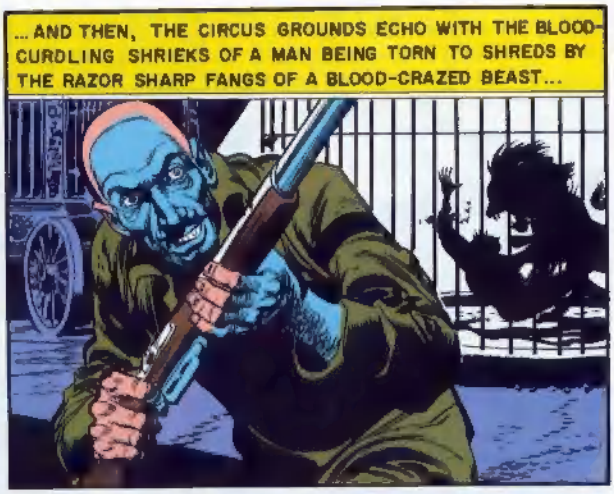
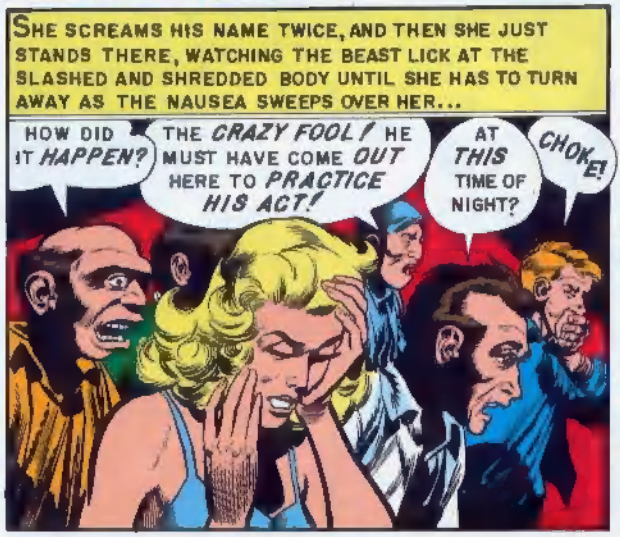
CARL SWINGS OPEN THE BARRED DOOR AND PUSHES. ERIC SCREAMS AND GOES SPRAWLING. THE LION SNARLS...


...AND THEN, THE CIRCUS GROUNDS ECHO WITH THE BLOOD-CURDLING SHRIEKS OF A MAN BEING TORN TO SHREDS BY THE RAZOR SHARP FANGS OF A BLOOD-CRAZED BEAST...

ERIC'S ANGUISHED SHRIEKS AWAKEN MARTA AND SHE LOOKS AROUND WILDLY...
CARL! WHAT WAS THAT? CARL! CA...

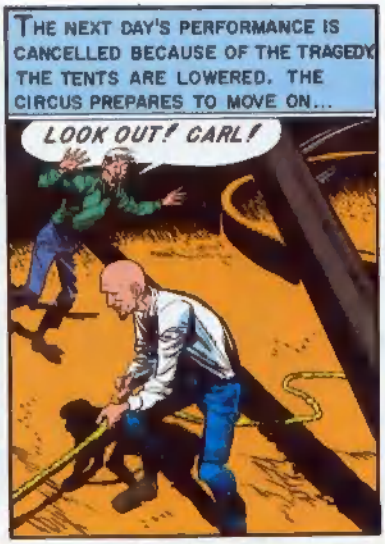
CARL'S BED IS EMPTY! OUTSIDE THE TENT, FOOTSTEPS POUND UP THE MIDWAY TOWARD THE BIG-TOP. MARTA SLIPS ON A ROBE AND BURSTS FROM THE TENT...
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
DON'T KNOW! IT'S COMIN' FROM THE BIG-TOP!

SHE RUNS WITH THE REST OF THEM... UNTIL THEY COME TO THE LION TRAINER'S CAGE...
GOOD LORD!
ERIC! ERIC!

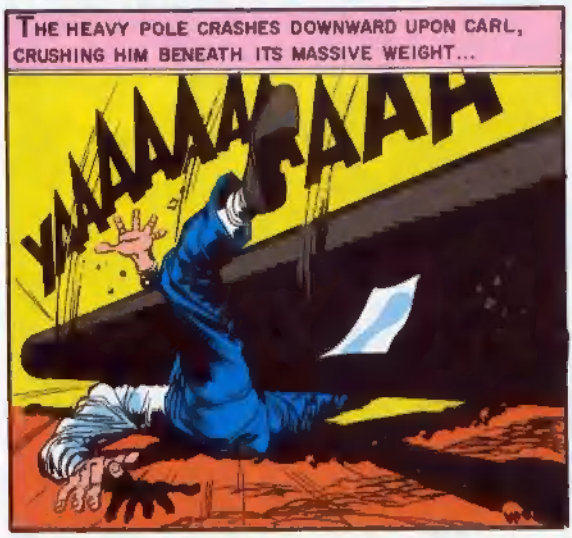

SHE SCREAMS HIS NAME TWICE, AND THEN SHE JUST STANDS THERE, WATCHING THE BEAST LICK AT THE SLASHED AND SHREDDED BODY UNTIL SHE HAS TO TURN AWAY AS THE NAUSEA SWEEPS OVER HER...
HOW DID IT HAPPEN?
THE CRAZY FOOL! HE MUST HAVE COME OUT HERE TO PRACTICE HIS ACT!
AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?
CHOKE!

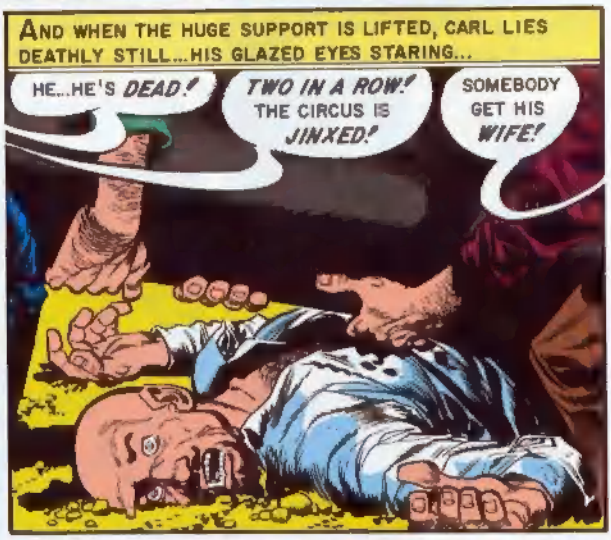
AND THEN, SICK, SHE RETURNS TO HER TENT AND SITS AND WAITS, CRYING, UNTIL CARL COMES IN WITH THAT EVIL GRIN ON HIS COLD IMPASSIVE FACE...
YOU DID IT, DIDN'T YOU! YOU KILLED HIM! YOU KNEW!
DIDN'T YOU HEAR WHAT THEY SAID, MARTA? THEY SAID HE MUST HAVE BEEN PRACTICING HIS ACT!

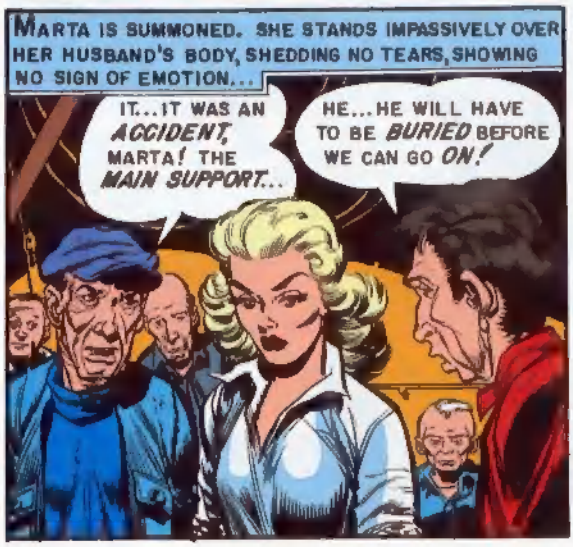
BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT IN MARTA'S MIND AS TO HOW ERIC DIED. CARL'S BED WAS EMPTY WHEN ERIC'S SCREAMS AWAKENED HER. THE SHEETS WERE COLD.
I HATE YOU! HATE YOU!
YOU WILL GET OVER IT, MARTA!


THE NEXT DAY'S PERFORMANCE IS CANCELLED BECAUSE OF THE TRAGEDY. THE TENTS ARE LOWERED. THE CIRCUS PREPARES TO MOVE ON...
LOOK OUT! CARL!

IT HAPPENS SUDDENLY... WITHOUT WARNING. CARL IS HELPING WITH THE DISMANTLING OF THE BIG-TOP WHEN THE MAIN SUPPORT TOPPLES...
GOOD LORD!


THE HEAVY POLE CRASHES DOWNWARD UPON CARL, CRUSHING HIM BENEATH ITS MASSIVE WEIGHT...
YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH


AND WHEN THE HUGE SUPPORT IS LIFTED, CARL LIES DEATHLY STILL...HIS GLAZED EYES STARING...
HE...HE'S DEAD!
TWO IN A ROW! THE CIRCUS IS JINXED!
SOMEBODY GET HIS WIFE!


MARTA IS SUMMONED. SHE STANDS IMPASSIVELY OVER HER HUSBAND'S BODY, SHEDDING NO TEARS, SHOWING NO SIGN OF EMOTION...
IT...IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, MARTA! THE MAIN SUPPORT...
HE...HE WILL HAVE TO BE BURIED BEFORE WE CAN GO ON!

MARTA'S VOICE IS COLD...CALLOUS...AS SHE ASKS...
SOMEBODY SEND FOR AN UNDERTAKER...

MARTA LOOKS DOWN AT THE STILL FORM OF HER HUSBAND LYING ON THE TANBARK FLOOR. AND EVEN THOUGH SHE READS HIS THOUGHTS, SHE SHOWS NO SIGNS OF RECOGNITION...

MARTA! MARTA, I AM *ALIVE!* I'M *NOT DEAD!* MARTA! *LISTEN* TO ME! *PLEASE!* TRY TO *HEAR* WHAT I AM *THINKING!* I'M *PARALYZED,* MARTA! I'M *NOT DEAD!* I'M *PARALYZED!* I CAN *SEE!* I CAN *HEAR!* I *CAN'T MOVE!*

AS THE UNDERTAKER AND HIS ASSISTANT LIFT POOR CARL INTO THE WICKER, MARTA MOVES FORWARD...

MARTA! PLEASE! SAVE ME! I'M ALIVE! MARTA! I'M ALIVE! PARALYZED! NOT DEAD! PARALYZED! MARTA! *PLEASE...*

WAIT!

OH, *MARTA! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!*

YES, MA'AM?

PLEASE DON'T EMBALM HIM. BURY HIM AS HE *IS.* HE WOULD HAVE *WANTED* IT THAT WAY!

ANYTHING YOU *SAY,* MA'AM!

MARTA! *MARTA, NO!*

MARTA LOOKS DOWN INTO PARALYZED EYES THAT CAN STILL SEE... WHISPERS INTO PARALYZED EARS THAT CAN STILL HEAR...

GOOD-BYE, CARL!

MARTA! OH, GOD! MARTA...

AT THE FUNERAL, MARTA STANDS, HER FACE A GRANITE MASK, BESIDE THE YAWNING PIT BELOW CARL'S COFFIN...

YOU CAN *STOP* THEM, MARTA! THERE'S *STILL TIME.* I *KNOW* YOU CAN HEAR ME. I *KNOW* IT! *PLEASE!* I *BEG* OF YOU! *DON'T* LET THEM *BURY ME ALIVE!*

LOWER THE COFFIN!

AND EVEN THOUGH THE SOIL IS SHOVELED DOWN UPON THE COFFIN, CARL'S FRANTIC THOUGHT WAVES STILL COME THROUGH TO HER...TO HER AND ONLY HER...TO MARTA, WHO TURNS AND WALKS AWAY DOWN THE PATH LEADING OUT OF THE CEMETERY...

MARTHA! DON'T *DO* THIS! *PLEASE! SAVE ME! PLEASE!* OH, LORD... *MAKE* HER SAVE ME!

CEME

THE AFTERNOON WANES. THE NIGHT BREEZE COMES UP, WHISPERING OVER THE GRAVE MOUNDS. SIX FEET BELOW, IN HIS COFFIN, CARL CONCENTRATES AS THE PRECIOUS OXYGEN SLOWLY DISAPPEARS...
MARTA! COME BACK! COME SAVE ME! I'LL DO ANYTHING! ANYTHING! HAVE PITY ON ME! HAVE PITY!
THE STARS COME OUT, WHITE PIN-POINTS IN A VELVET SHROUD. A FIGURE MOVES OVER THE GRAVE MOUNDS...
I KNOW YOU ARE RECEIVING MY THOUGHTS, MARTA! I KNOW...
A SHOVEL DIGS INTO THE SOFT EARTH...
MARTA! MARTA, YOU DID COME! YOU DID!
THE DIGGING CONTINUES, THE SHOVEL SCOOPING AWAY THE SOFT EARTH. FINALLY THE LID OF THE COFFIN SWINGS BACK...
MARTA! DARLING! I... OH, LORD... YOU'RE NOT MARTA!
AND THEN AS CARL LIES HELPLESS...PARALYZED...LIKE A LION-TAMER WITHOUT A WHIP ...FEELING THE RAZOR SHARP TEETH RIPPING AND TEARING AT HIS FLESH...UNABLE TO SCREAM AT THE EXCRUCIATING PAIN, HE THINKS OF THE NEWSPAPER LYING IN THE MOONLIGHT... THE NEWSPAPER THAT FIRST GAVE HIM THE IDEA OF HOW TO KILL ERIC...
'BODIES DISINTERRED AT LOCAL GRAVE YARD... TORN TO PIECES AS IF ATTACKED BY SOME WILD BEAST!' OH, LORD! THEY WERE WRONG! THIS IS NO BEAST! IT'S A GHOUL!
HEH, HEH! YEP, KIDDIES! CARL ENDED UP JUST LIKE ERIC... BEING TORN TO BITS AND UNABLE TO DEFEND HIMSELF. AS FOR MARTA... SHE READ CARL'S FINAL THOUGHTS, AND GOT QUITE A MENTAL PICTURE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON! JUST ONE MORE THOUGHT ON THIS WHOLE SUBJECT: AS THE BOP CEMETERY FOREMAN KEEPS TELLING HIS WORK CREWS, 'DIG THAT CRA-AZY GRAVE!'
WELL, V.K. AWAITS, SO... 'BYE, NOW!
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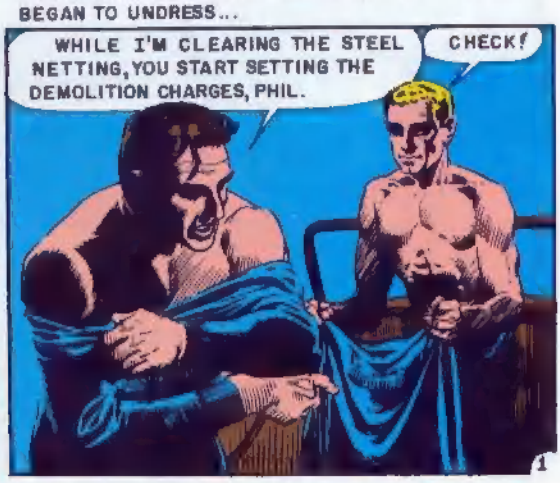
THE VAULT OF HORROR!®

HEH, HEH! *SALUTATIONS, SLIME SAVORERS!!* NOW IT'S TIME FOR A JAUNT INTO THE *VAULT OF HORROR.* THIS IS YOUR *HOST* IN *HOWLS, THE VAULT-KEEPER,* READY TO ENTERTAIN YOU IN C.K.'S MAG WITH A FAVORITE YELP-YARN FROM MY CREEP-COLLECTION. SO HAVE THE *BICARB* READY AND I'LL *UPSET* YOUR *STOMACH* WITH THE TUMMY-TURNER I CALL...

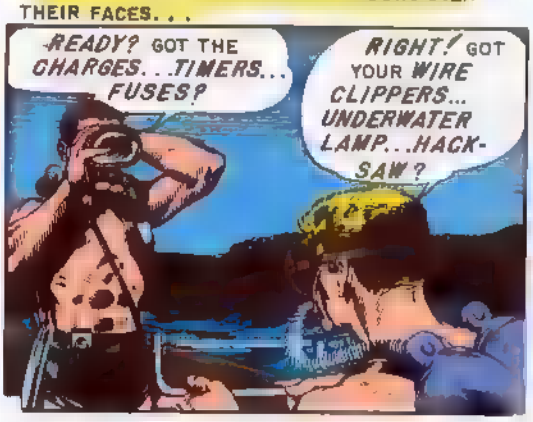
PEARLY TO DEAD

OUR STORY BEGINS DURING WORLD WAR II, WHEN THE UNITED STATES MARINES WERE SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY INCHING ACROSS THE SOUTH PACIFIC AREA, INVADING AND BATTLING FOR EACH BLOODY ATOLL, EACH JAPANESE-INFESTED CORAL ROCK. ONE INKY BLACK STARLESS NIGHT, A SMALL BOAT MOVED SILENTLY TOWARD THE CORAL REEF THAT RINGED THE PEACEFUL LAGOON OF ONE OF THESE JAPANESE-HELD ISLANDS. INSIDE, TWO MEN CROUCHED QUIETLY, STUDYING THE DANCING FIRES ON THE SHORE ACROSS THE PLACID LAGOON...

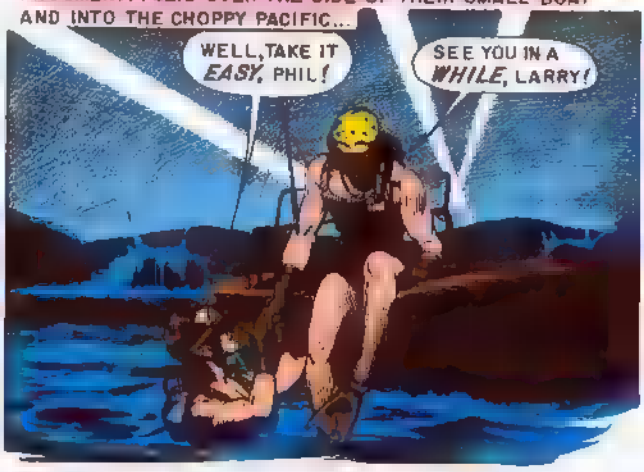
THE ANCHOR SLID OVER THE SMALL BOAT'S SIDE AND DROPPED WITH A MUFFLED SPLASH INTO THE BLACK PACIFIC. THEN, STRANGELY, THE TWO MEN BEGAN TO UNDRESS...



THEY STOOD ALMOST NAKED IN THE PACIFIC NIGHT, MUSCLES RIPPLING. THEY BENT AND SLID THE WEIRDLY SHAPED BLACK RUBBER FLIPPERS ONTO THEIR FEET... PULLED THEIR RUBBER MASKS WITH THE ROUND GLASS WINDOWS OVER THEIR FACES. . .

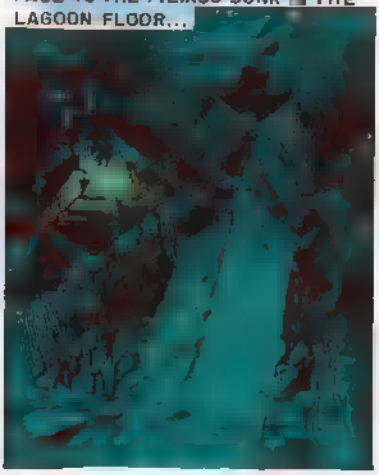


SILENTLY, THE TWO MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY'S UNDERWATER DEMOLITION TEAM... THE FABULOUS FROGMEN... SLID OVER THE SIDE OF THEIR SMALL BOAT AND INTO THE CHOPPY PACIFIC...

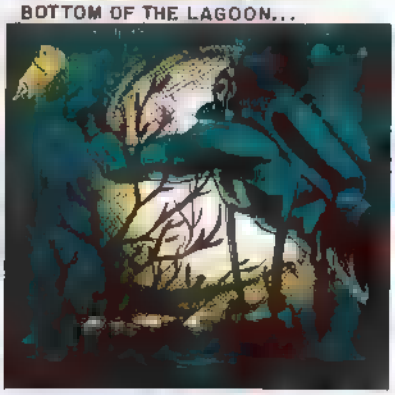


... AND WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS. ...THE BUSINESS OF CLEARING THE WAY FOR THE INVASION OF THE FOLLOWING MORNING. THE ONE NAMED LARRY GLIDED DOWNWARD, FLICKING ON HIS LAMP, SEARCHING OUT THE TREACHEROUS PROPELLER-SHATTERING STEEL NETTING...

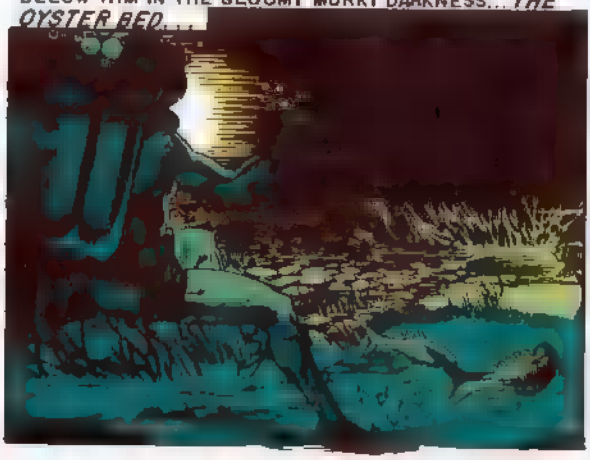
... AS THE OTHER, THE ONE NAMED PHIL, SKIMMED BELOW THE SURFACE TO THE PILINGS SUNK [redacted] THE LAGOON FLOOR...



WITH THE NETTING CLIPPED AND SAWED AND CUT AWAY AND RENDERED HARMLESS, LARRY SHOT TOWARDS PHIL TO HELP PLACE THE DEMOLITION CHARGES, HIS LANTERN BEAM RUNNING ACROSS THE SANDY BOTTOM OF THE LAGOON...

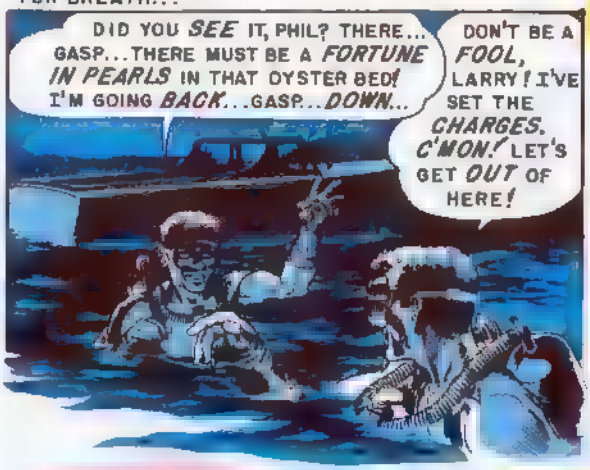


AND THEN, SUDDENLY, HE SAW IT... STRETCHING AWAY BELOW HIM IN THE GLOOMY MURKY DARKNESS... *THE OYSTER BED...*



AS LARRY CIRCLED OVER THE BED, STUDYING THE ABNORMALLY-LARGE SHELLED SEA CREATURES WITH THEIR PRICELESS GLOBED GEMS IMBEDDED [redacted] THEIR QUIVERING MEATY BODIES, PHIL GLIDED TOWARD HIM, STARING WIDE-EYED...

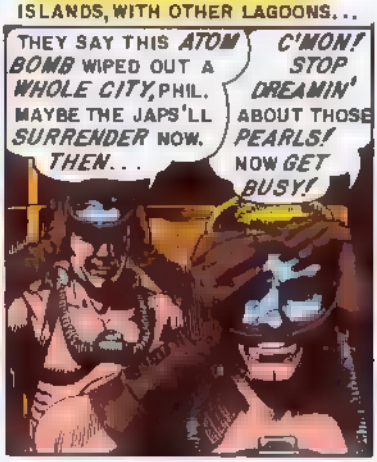
THE TWO MEN SURFACED BESIDE THEIR BOAT, GASPING FOR BREATH...



MINUTES LATER, THE SMALL BOAT WAS HUMMING SEAWARD. BEHIND, THE DEMOLITION CHARGES EXPLODED IN THE PLACID LAGOON SIGNALLING THE MIGHTY BATTLE WAGONS OFFSHORE TO BEGIN THEIR BARRAGE. LARRY SWORE ABOVE THE DIN...

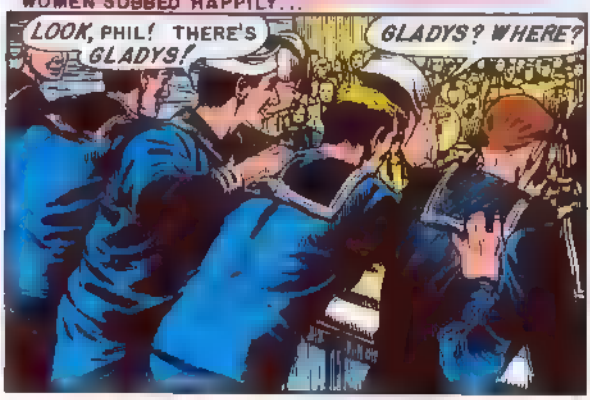
AT DAWN THE NEXT MORNING, THE ASSAULT BOATS STORMED THE QUIET LAGOON, AND PROPELLERS CHURNED BLOOD INTO THE WATERS ABOVE THE OYSTER BED...

THE BEACHHEAD WAS SECURED. THE DEMOLITION TEAM'S WORK WAS DONE. LARRY AND PHIL WERE SHIPPED ELSEWHERE TO OTHER ISLANDS, WITH OTHER LAGOONS...

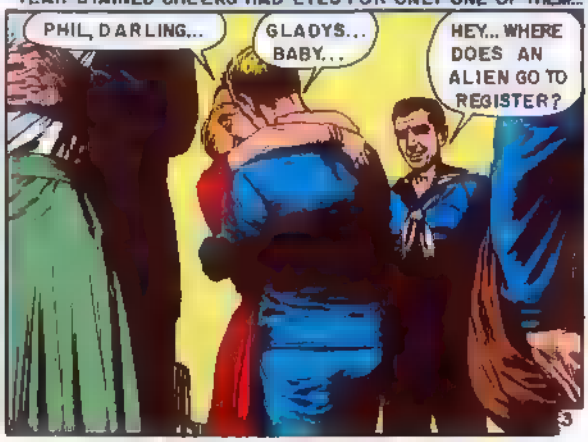


V-J DAY! PEACE! IT CAME SUDDENLY... AFTER THE SECOND A-BOMB WAS DROPPED. THE JAPANESE SIGNED AN UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER AND THE WAR WAS OVER...

SAN FRANCISCO'S GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE CAME UP OUT OF THE MIST ONE MORNING. THE TROOPSHIP SLIPPED BENEATH IT AND NOSED ■ TOWARDS A PIER WHERE BANDS PLAYED AND CHILDREN CHEERED AND WOMEN SOBBED HAPPILY...



THEY CAME DOWN THE GANGPLANK TOGETHER, SIDE BY SIDE, LARRY AND PHIL. BUT THE GIRL THAT WAITED WITH TEAR-STAINED CHEEKS HAD EYES FOR ONLY ONE OF THEM...



LARRY TRIED TO HIDE THE JEALOUS ANGER... THE HURT THAT HE FELT. GLADY'S PREFERENCE HAD COME AS A GREAT SHOCK TO HIM...

I...I *WANTED* TO TELL YOU, LARRY! BUT... WELL... I...

I UNDERSTAND, GLADYS...

PHIL HAD WON AGAIN. IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT... EVER SINCE THEIR COLLEGE DAYS, THEY'D BOTH COME OUT FOR THE SWIM TEAM...

THAT'S *GOOD TIME*, SON! ER... *WHAT* DID YOU SAY YOUR *NAME* WAS?

LARRY! LARRY MILES!

LARRY'D DONE HIS BEST. BUT PHIL... PHIL HAD DONE JUST A WEE BIT BETTER...

CONGRATULATIONS, BOY! THAT BEATS *MILES'S TIME* BY *EIGHT TENTHS!* ER...

THE NAME'S PHIL *CANNON*, COACH!

LARRY AND PHIL HAD BECOME FAST FRIENDS IN COLLEGE. BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS THAT RIVALRY BETWEEN THEM...

COME ON, LARRY!

LET'S GO, PHIL!

MILES IS *GREAT*, AND *CANNON* IS *BETTER*. WE'VE GOT *SOME SWIM TEAM* THIS YEAR.

... NOT ONLY IN THE POOL... BUT ALSO ON THE CAMPUS...

HEY, YOU TWO! I WANT YOU TO MEET GLADYS HARDY! GLADYS, MEET OUR TWO SWIM CHAMPS... LARRY MILES AND PHIL CANNON...

HI!

VERY NICE! ARE YOU *BUSY* TONIGHT, MISS HARDY?

SORRY, LARRY! MISS HARDY ALREADY *HAS* A DATE... WITH *ME!*

WHEN GLADYS HAD COME INTO THEIR LIVES, THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO BOYS HAD INCREASED. THE'Y BOTH FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER...

GLADYS, YOU *KNOW* HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU! *SAY 'YES'*... AND I'LL BUY YOU THE *BIGGEST ENGAGEMENT RING* IN THE *STORE*...

LARRY! I...I *LIKE* YOU... BUT... WELL, I JUST *CAN'T* MAKE UP MY *MIND!*

THEN, PEARL HARBOR, AND THE U.S. WAS IN A WAR. THE NAVY HAD COME TO LARRY AND PHIL... ASKED THEM TO JOIN THE UNDERWATER DEMOLITION TEAM. AND THEY'D ACCEPTED...

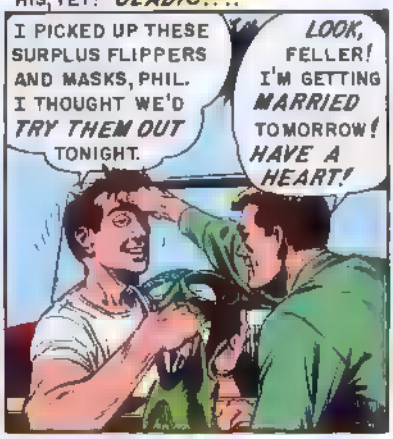
SO LONG, BABY!

WRITE!

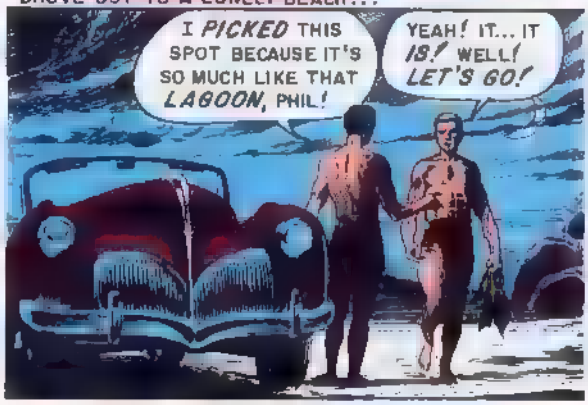
I WILL! GOOD-BYE, BOYS! TAKE CARE...

AND NOW THEY WERE BACK FROM THE WAR, STANDING ON A JAMMED PIER FULL OF RETURNED SAILORS AND SOLDIERS AND HAPPY LOVED ONES, AND PHIL HAD WON AGAIN . . .

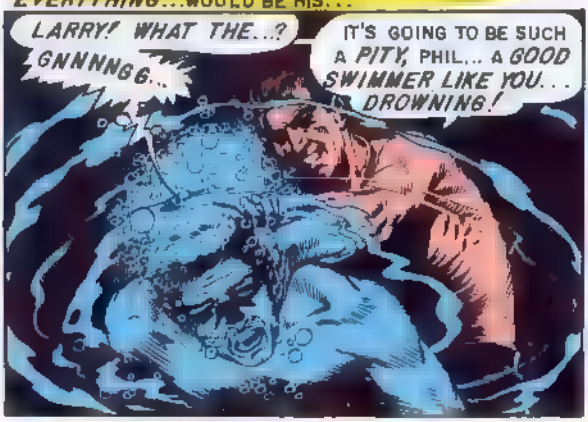
DISCHARGE! CIVILIAN CLOTHES AGAIN! FREEDOM FROM REGIMENTATION... DISCIPLINE! THEY WERE ALL LARRY'S NOW. AND A SECRET, TOO! A MILLION DOLLAR SECRET! JUST ONE THING... ONE THING WASN'T HIS, YET! GLADYS!...



LARRY CONVINCED PHIL THAT AFTER HE WAS MARRIED THERE'D BE NO CHANCE TO TRY OUT THEIR EQUIPTMENT, AND PHIL RELUCTANTLY AGREED. THEY DROVE OUT TO A LONELY BEACH...



LARRY HAD PLANNED IT ALL SO CAREFULLY! WITH PHIL DEAD, GLADYS...THE SECRET OF THE PEARL-BED... EVERYTHING...WOULD BE HIS...

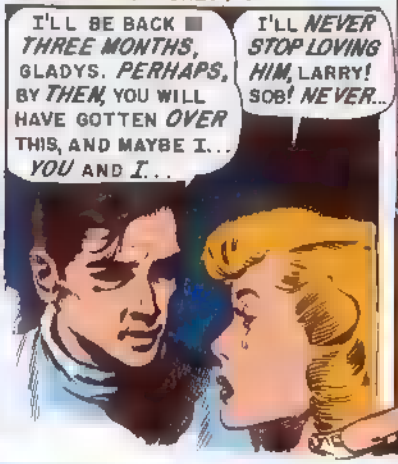


THEY STRUGGLED WILDLY, THERE IN THE FOAMING SURF OF THAT LONELY CALIFORNIA BEACH. LARRY HELD PHIL'S THROAT IN A VICE-LIKE GRIP, UNTIL PHIL'S BODY WENT LIMP AND LIFE LEFT IT AND IT SLIPPED FROM LARRY'S GRASP AND SANK BENEATH THE OCEAN WAVES. . .

AND LARRY CAME OUT OF THE WATER ALONE WITH A GRIM SMILE ON HIS FACE AND THE STORY HE'D TELL GLADYS SO CLEAR IN HIS MIND...

GLADYS LISTENED TO LARRY AS HE SOBBED OUT THE STORY OF HOW THEY'D GONE SWIMMING...HE AND PHIL...AND PHIL'D GONE DOWN...AND...

IT WOULD TAKE TIME LARRY DECIDED...TIME FOR GLADYS TO FORGET PHIL. IN THE MEANWHILE, HE WOULD GO TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC...TO THE TINY ATOLL WITH ITS FABULOUS OYSTER BED...AND MAKE HIS FORTUNE...

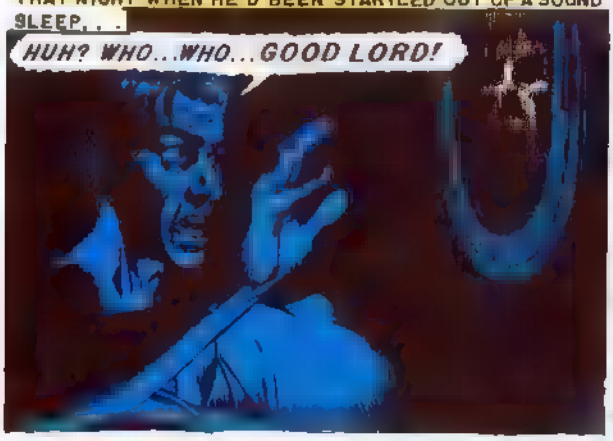


THE TRIP TO THE ATOLL WAS LONG, BUT LARRY DIDN'T MIND IT. ONCE ON BOARD, HE LOST NO TIME MAKING FRIENDS...

WERE HIS EYES DECEIVING HIM? WAS THE FOAM AND THE SPRAY AND THE CHURNING WATER BESIDE THE SHIP PLAYING TRICKS ON HIM, OR DID HE ACTUALLY SEE THE BLOATED WHITE BODY?...

AND WAS THE FOUL ODOR OF THE SEA AND DECAY AND ROTTING FLESH THAT SEARED HIS NOSTRILS WHEN HE OPENED HIS CABIN DOOR THAT NIGHT JUST LARRY'S IMAGINATION?...

WAS IT A DREAM? OR DID LARRY ACTUALLY SEE THE WHITE PULPY FISH-PITTED FACE IN THE PORTHOLE THAT NIGHT WHEN HE'D BEEN STARTLED OUT OF A SOUND SLEEP...



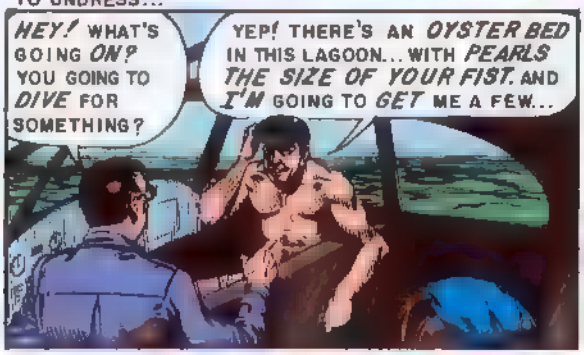
AND WAS IT THE SEA, OR DID HE ACTUALLY HEAR THAT LAUGHTER...THAT RIPPLING BLOOD-CURDLING LAUGHTER COMING FROM THE MURKY FOG BEYOND THE SHIP THE NIGHT HE STROLLED THE DECK ALONE.

THE SHIP DOCKED AT TAHITI AND LARRY LOST NO TIME IN HIRING A PLANE TO TAKE HIM SOUTH TO THE ATOLL...

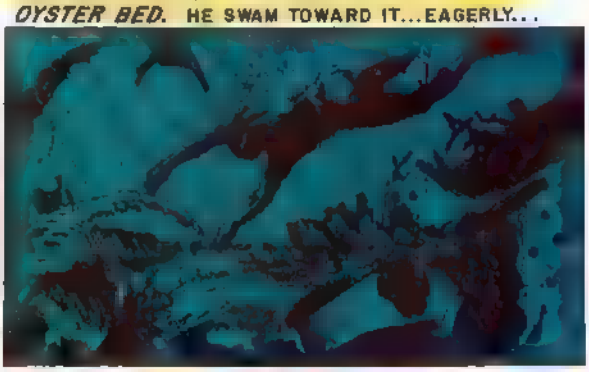
ON THAT PLANE TRIP SOUTH... SKIMMING LOW OVER THE BLUE PACIFIC... WAS LARRY CRAZY... OR DID HE SEE IT AGAIN... THERE JUST BELOW HIM... THAT *ASHEN, PULPY, BLOATED FORM?...*

THE ATOLL CAME UP... A PEARL AGAINST A BLUE SATIN SEA-LINING... GUARDING ITS *OWN* PEARL TREASURE. LARRY CAST HIS FEARS FROM HIS MIND WHEN HE SAW IT...

THE TINY SEAPLANE CAME DOWN GENTLY AND SAT BOBBING QUIETLY IN THE BLUE LAGOON AS LARRY UNPACKED HIS GEAR, REMOVED THE FLIPPERS AND THE RUBBER GLASS-WINDOWED MASK, AND BEGAN TO UNDRESS...



TINY FISH SCATTERED BEFORE HIM AS LARRY SHOT DOWNWARD. HE PASSED THE OLD RUSTED NETTINGS... THE SUNKEN ASSAULT BOATS... THE WATER-LOGGED BLASTED PILINGS. AND THEN HE SAW IT... *THE OYSTER BED.* HE SWAM TOWARD IT... EAGERLY...



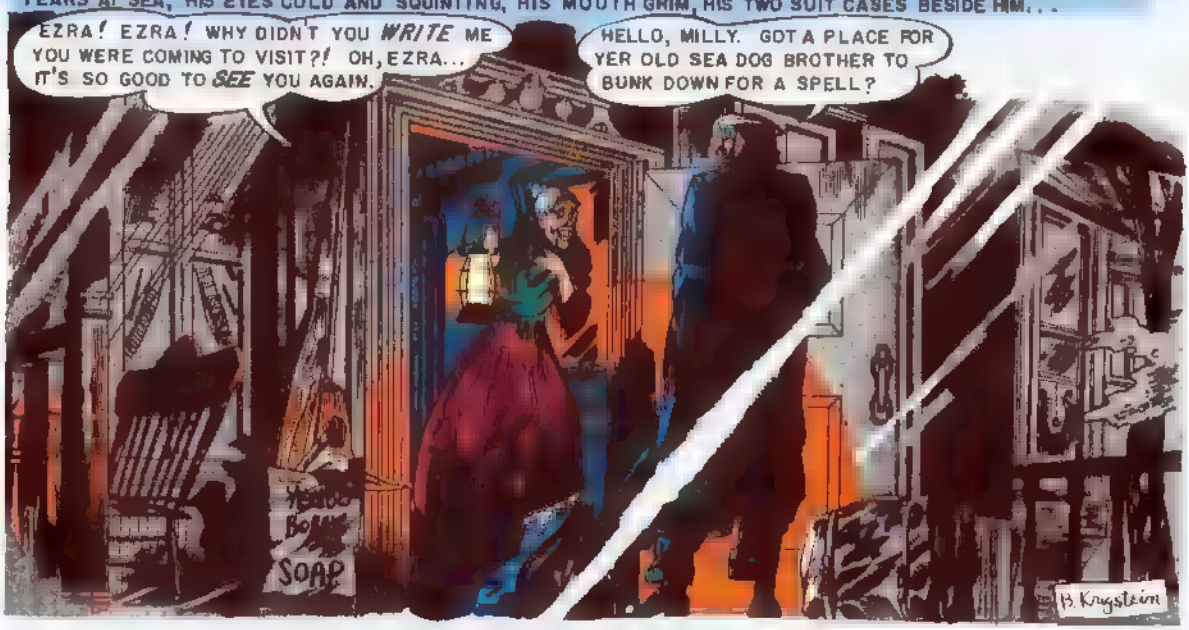
LARRY WAS SO BUSY WRENCHING THE LARGEST OYSTER HE COULD FIND FROM THE SANDY BOTTOM THAT HE NEVER NOTICED THE PUTRID, SLIMY, WHITE FORM DRIFT TOWARD HIM. AND WHEN ITS BLOATED ARMS CLOSED AROUND HIS NECK, AND THE ROTTED FACE GRINNED AT HIM, *IT WAS TOO LATE...*

HEH, HEH! YEP, KIDDIES! THAT'S MY YARN. THE *PILOT* OF THE SEAPLANE WAITED AROUND FOR LARRY TO COME UP FOR *SEVERAL HOURS.* FINALLY, HE SHRUGGED, WENT THROUGH LARRY'S PANTS, EXTRACTED THE MONEY FROM HIS WALLET TOSSED THE REST OF LARRY'S GEAR INTO THE LAGOON, AND *TOOK OFF.* AND *YOU'LL* TAKE OFF WHEN YOU READ THE *NEXT VAULT-KEEPER* YARN! HEH... HEH! NOW I'LL TURN YOU BACK TO *C.K.!* I'LL SEE YOU *NEXT* IN *MY* MAG, THE *VAULT* OF *HORROR!* *'BYE!* *E.C.,* THAT IS!

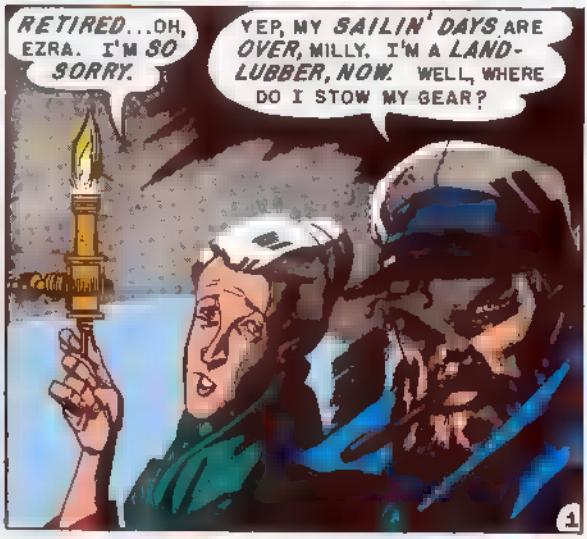
HERE'S A BUBBLY LITTLE TALE OF TITANIC TERROR! I CALL IT...

PRAIRIE SCHOONER

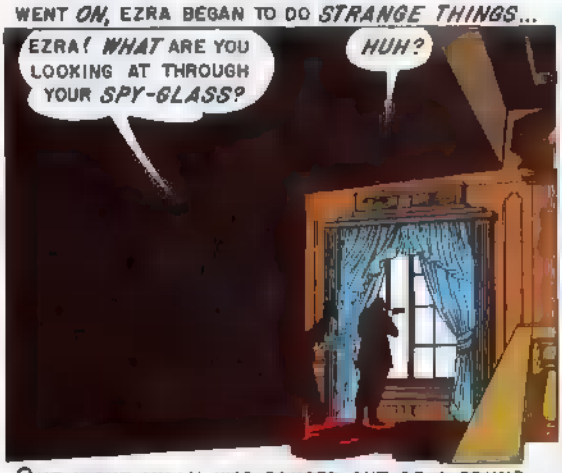
MILDRED JACKSON FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR OF HER HOUSE AND SQUEALED WITH JOY. HE STOOD ON THE PAINT-STARVED FRONT PORCH, DRESSED RESPLENDENTLY IN HIS CAPTAIN'S UNIFORM, HIS FACE BRONZED FROM FORTY YEARS AT SEA, HIS EYES COLD AND SQUINTING, HIS MOUTH GRIM, HIS TWO SUIT CASES BESIDE HIM...

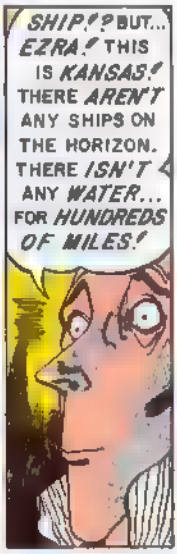


MILLY LED EZRA INTO THE PARLOR...

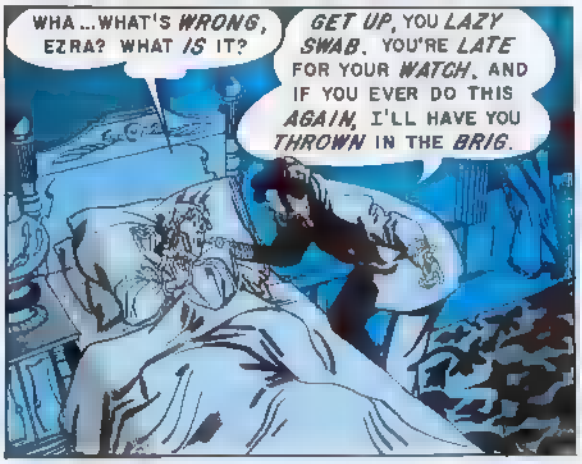


THAT WAS HOW EZRA JACKSON CAME TO LIVE WITH HIS SISTER MILDRED. AT *FIRST*, MILLY WAS VERY HAPPY TO *HAVE* HIM. AFTER ALL, SHE *WAS* AN *OLD MAID*...AND EZRA *WAS* COMPANY. BUT AS *TIME* WENT *ON*, EZRA BEGAN TO DO *STRANGE THINGS*...

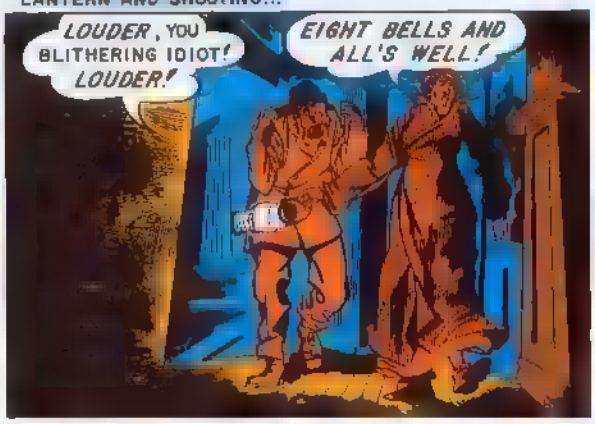




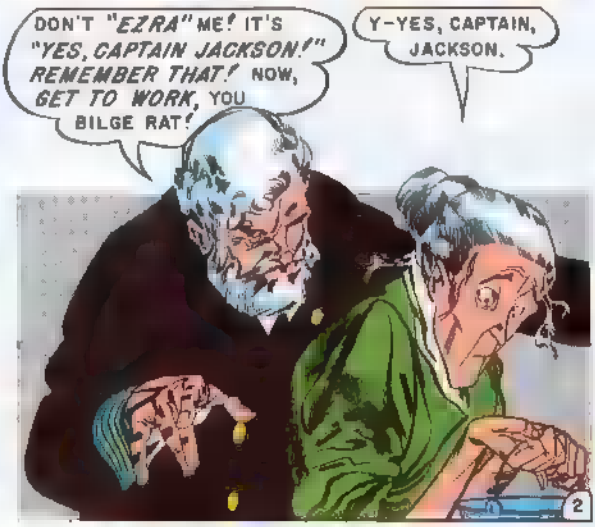
ONE NIGHT, MILLY WAS ROUSED OUT OF A SOUND SLEEP BY HEAVY PAWS SHAKING HER ROUGHLY...



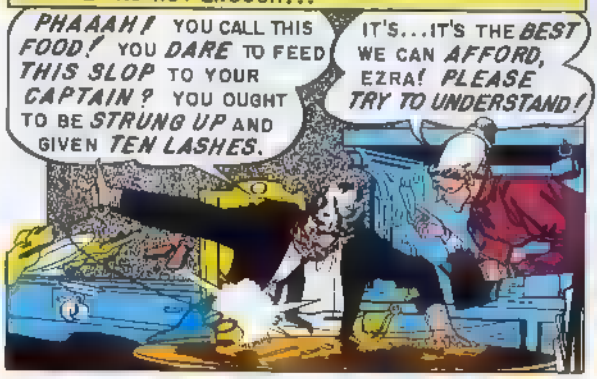
FROM THAT NIGHT ON, MILLY WAS FORCED TO "STAND WATCH." SHE HAD TO MOVE THROUGH THE HALLS OF THE OLD HOUSE FROM TWO A.M. TO DAWN, CARRYING A LANTERN AND SHOUTING...



IT WAS OBVIOUS TO POOR MILLY THAT HER OLDER BROTHER WAS ILL...MENTALLY ILL. THE SHOCK OF BEING RETIRED HAD BEEN TOO MUCH FOR HIM. HIS MIND HAD SNAPPED. HE FANCIED HIMSELF AT SEA AGAIN ... THE HOUSE, HIS SHIP...AND SHE, HIS CREW...



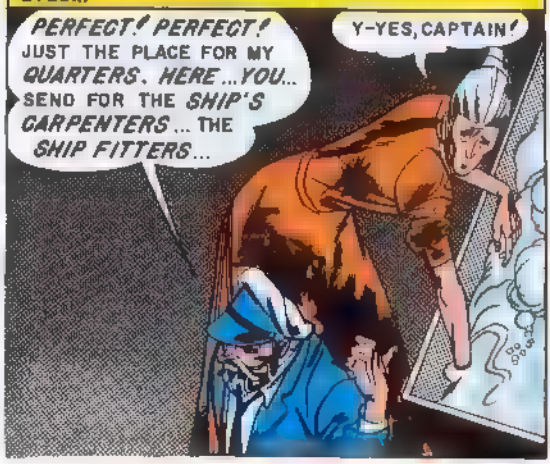
MILLY HAD BEEN A SCHOOL TEACHER IN HER YOUNGER YEARS. SHE'D WORKED HARD AND MANAGED TO SAVE A SMALL AMOUNT OF MONEY. SHE'D USED PART OF IT TO BUY THE HOUSE SHE NOW LIVED IN. THE REST, SHE'D INVESTED WISELY, AND SHE'D BEEN ABLE TO LIVE COMFORTABLY. BUT WITH EZRA'S ARRIVAL, HER MEAGER INCOME WAS NOT ENOUGH...



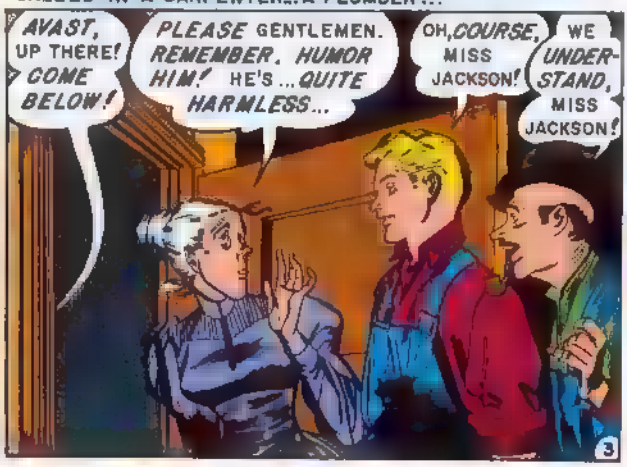
SO MILLY WAS FORCED TO EARN EXTRA MONEY TO AUGMENT THE SMALL INCOME SHE DERIVED FROM HER INVESTMENTS. SHE HAD TO TAKE IN WASHING...

EZRA CAME DOWN THE CELLAR STAIRS, SCREAMING...

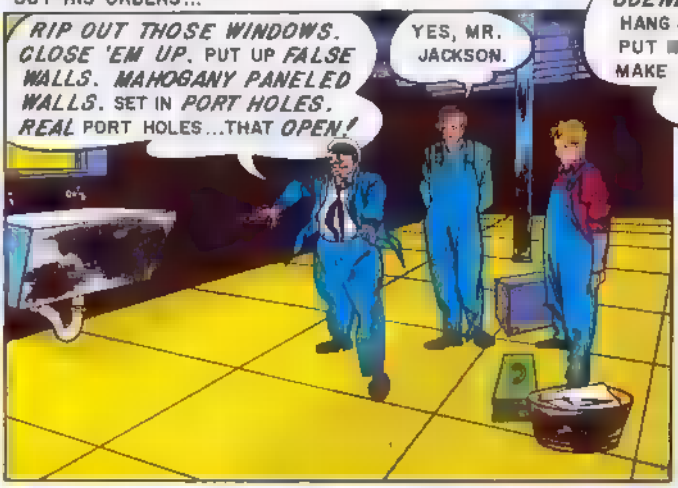
EZRA STOOD THE CENTER OF THE CELLAR FLOOR, STARING ABOUT HIM WITH WIDE GLEAMING EYES...



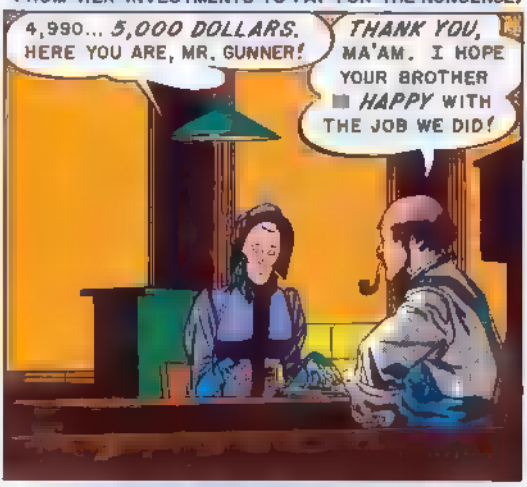
MILLY WAS HELPLESS. SHE HAD NO OTHER CHOICE... EXCEPT, PERHAPS, TO HAVE EZRA PUT AWAY. SO SHE CALLED IN A CARPENTER... A PLUMBER...



EZRA STORMED ABOUT IN THE CELLAR, SHOUTING OUT HIS ORDERS...



AND POOR MILLY WITHDREW HER LIFE'S SAVINGS FROM HER INVESTMENTS TO PAY FOR THE NONSENSE.



"BELOW" IN HIS SHIP'S QUARTERS, CAPTAIN JACKSON BELLOWED...

MILLY CAME "BELOW" CARRYING HER LAUNDRY BASKET FILLED WITH THE WASH SHE'D BEEN TAKING IN...

EZRA STRUCK OUT SAVAGELY...

WITH HER INVESTMENTS WIPED OUT AND THE INCOME FROM THEM GONE, MILLY HAD TO TAKE IN MORE WASH THAN SHE COULD HANDLE IN ORDER TO MEET EXPENSES. AND EZRA'S ABUSE BECAME WORSE AND WORSE . . .

SCRUB OUT THAT *HEAD*, YOU *FO'C'SLE DRUDGE!*

Y-YES, CAPTAIN!

POOR MILLY WOULD ESCAPE, EVERY CHANCE SHE COULD GET, AND LOCK HERSELF IN THE UPSTAIRS BATHROOM IN ORDER TO DO THE WASH IN THE TUB. AND AS SHE SCRUBBED, SHE WOULD LISTEN TO EZRA'S RANTING AND RAVING...

EASE THE HELM! GIVE 'ER MORE RUDDER! STEADY AS YOU GO! HARD APORT! STEADY! STEADY SO!

SOB...SOB...

ONE HOT SUMMER'S DAY, EZRA STOOD AT THE OPEN PORT HOLE, SHOUTING OUT AT THE SEA-SCAPE SCENE BEYOND...

AHOY! AHOY THERE! SHIP AHOY! HOLD FAST. STAND BY!

WHILE UPSTAIRS, DIRECTLY OVERHEAD IN THE BATHROOM, MILLY PANTED OVER A LOAD OF WASH...

THE HOT WATER, RUNNING INTO THE TUB OVER THE SOAKING CLOTHES SENT UP CLOUDS OF STEAM WHICH FILLED THE LOCKED BATHROOM...

SUDDENLY MILLY CLUTCHED AT THE EXCRUCIATING PAIN IN HER CHEST, TOPPLING OVER...

GASP...

AND AS HER HEART FAILED AND HER LIFE FADED WITH IT, THE BOILING WATER OVERFLOWED THE TUB, POOLING ABOUT HER PROSTRATE BODY, SINKING THROUGH THE BATHROOM FLOOR...

IN HIS CELLAR SHIP'S QUARTERS, CAPTAIN JACKSON LISTEN AS THE WATER, LEAKING DOWN FROM THE OVERFLOWING BATHTUB ABOVE, FILLED THE SPACE BETWEEN THE FALSE MAHOGANY PANELED WALLS AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOUSE...

STORMY SEA TONIGHT. BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES. WE'RE IN FOR A BLOW.

SUDDENLY, THE WATER BEGAN TO POUR THROUGH THE OPEN PORT HOLES...

ALL HANDS! ALL HANDS! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER! MAN THE BILGE PUMPS. SECURE THE BULWARKS...

THE CELLAR FILLED WITH STEAM. CAPTAIN JACKSON STAGGERED TO THE PORT HOLES, SLAMMED THEM SHUT. THE PRESSURE OF THE WATER CRUMBLED THE PANELED WALLS...

ABANDON SHIP! WE'RE SINKING!

SLOWLY THE WATER ROSE IN THE CELLAR, BOILING, SCALDING, BLISTERING EZRA'S AGED BODY. BUT HE STUBBORNLY STOOD FAST...

ABANDON SHIP! THE CAPTAIN MUST REMAIN...

...UNTIL THE RISING HOT WATER REACHED HIS CHIN...HIS NECK...POURED INTO HIS MOUTH AND STEWED HIS TONGUE...HIS THROAT...HIS LUNGS...

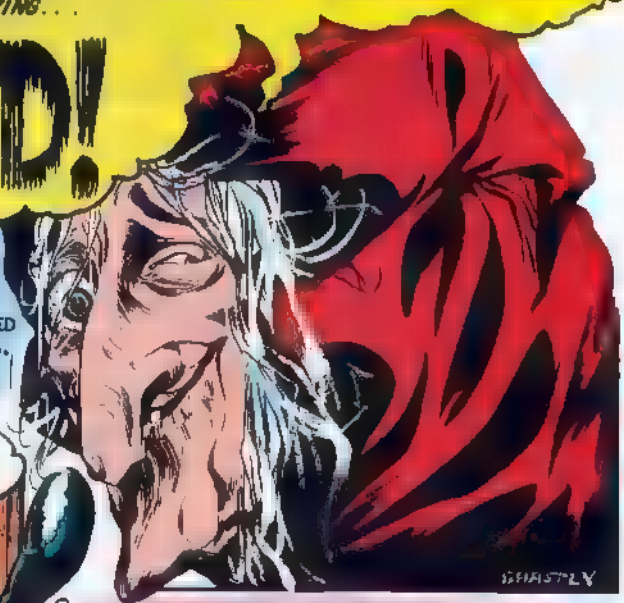
GLUGG... GLUGG...

HEE, HEE! YEP, KIDDIES. THAT'S MY *MORBID MARINE* OFFERING. EZRA FINALLY *ENDED UP*... IN *HOT WATER!* THIS IS THE *FIRST* CASE ON RECORD, BY THE WAY, OF A *CAPTAIN GOING DOWN WITH HIS SHIP* ■ THE *MIDDLE* OF A *KANSAS PRAIRIE*... IN A *CELLAR*. AND NOW, I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO THE *OLD WITCH*, WHO IS WAITING TO *WIND UP* MY *REEK-RAG! REMEMBER!* IF YOU'RE A *FAN*... AND AN *ADDICT*... YOU'RE AN... *E.C. FAN-ADDICT!* AHEM... 'BYE, NOW!

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! AND NOW, IT'S *MORBID-MEAL-TIME.* WELCOME TO *THE HAUNT OF FEAR,* CREEPS. THIS IS YOUR *REVOLTING RESTAURATEUR, THE OLD WITCH,* READY TO *SLING SLIME*...AND *WIND UP* C.K.'S *MUCK-MAG* FOR *THIS IDIOTIC ISSUE.* CARE FOR SOME *SEA FOOD?* WELL, HERE'S A *TASTY TERROR TID-BIT* TO TURN YOUR STOMACH. I CALL THIS *SLOP-SERVING*...

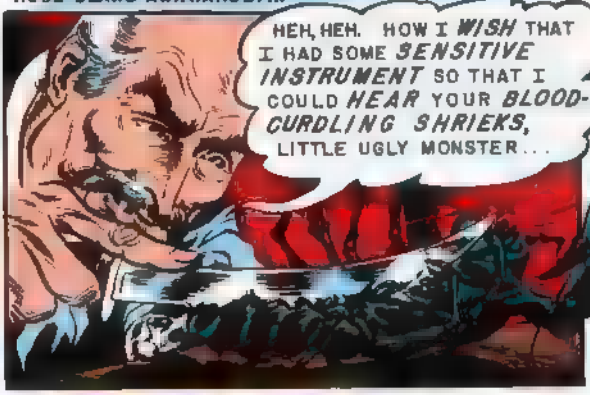
HALF-BAKED!



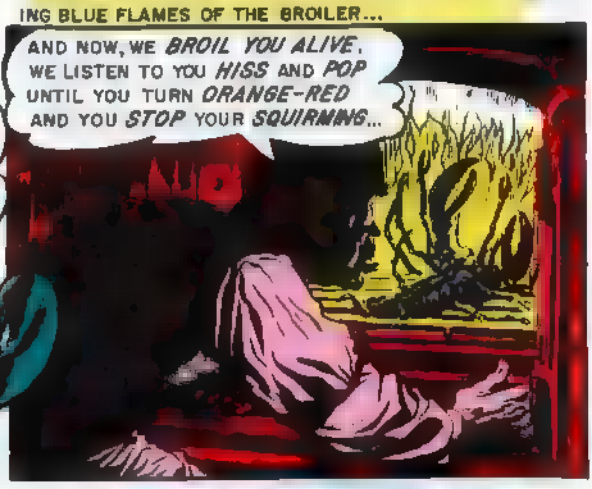
CALVIN DUGAN STOOD IN THE SPOTLESS KITCHEN OF *'THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT'* STARING IN MORBID FASCINATION AT THE SQUIRMING, BLUE-GREEN, SPINEY-LEGGED CLAWED CREATURES THAT SCRATCHED DRYLY AROUND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BUTTER TUB. CAUTIOUSLY, HE REACHED IN AND PULLED ONE OF THEM FROM THE TUB, HOLDING IT UP. HE LAUGHED SADISTICALLY...

CALVIN REACHED FOR A KNIFE. HE PLACED THE STRUGGLING LOBSTER, BELLY UP, ON THE HUGE WOODEN KITCHEN TABLE AND GRINNED DOWN AT IT...

THE LOBSTER SQUIRMED. CALVIN FORCED THE KNIFE BLADE AGAINST ITS SOFT-SHELLED UNDERSIDE AND, WITH A SLIGHT SAWING MOTION, CRUNCHED IT THROUGH. THE LOBSTER, NOW PRACTICALLY SEVERED IN HALF, STILL WRIGGLED ITS SPINEY LEGS AND WAVED ITS HUGE CLAWS AWKWARDLY...

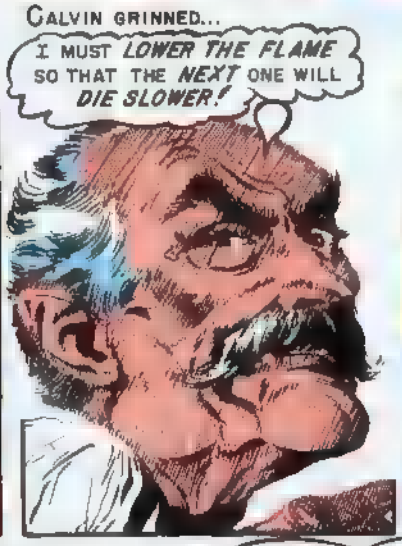


CALVIN MOVED THE THRASHING SPLIT LOBSTER ONTO A RACK AND SLID IT INTO THE STOVE, BELOW THE LICKING BLUE FLAMES OF THE BROILER...

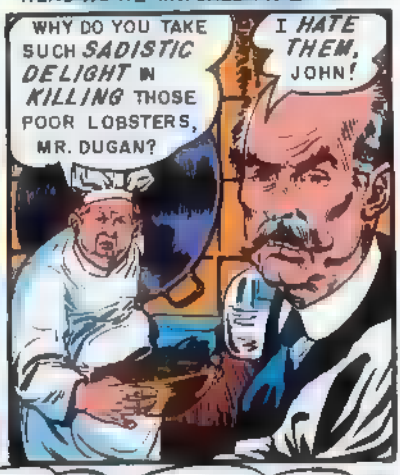


CALVIN STARED INTO THE STOVE AT THE BROILING LOBSTER. HIS EYES GLINTED ALMOST MANIACALLY AS HE WATCHED ITS STRUGGLING ABATE...

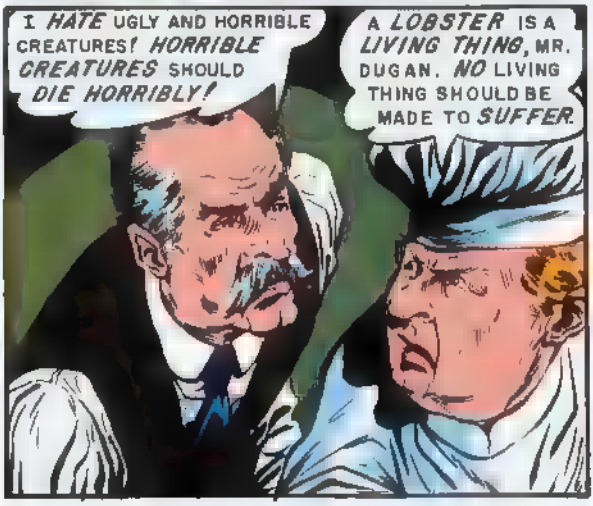
CALVIN GRINNED...

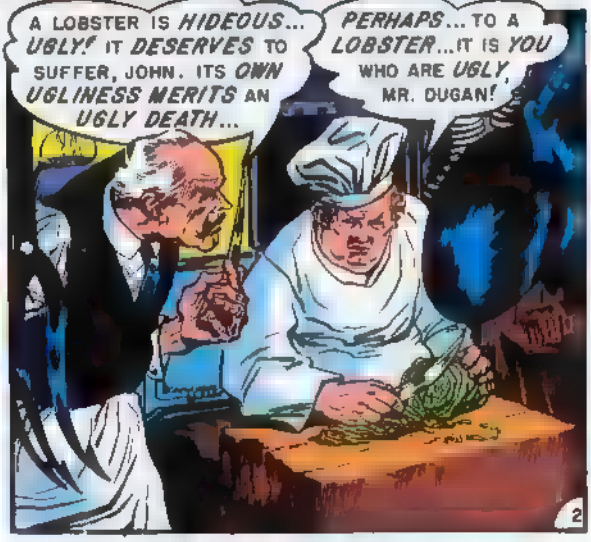


BEHIND CALVIN, *THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT'S* CHEF SHOOK HIS HEAD AS HE WATCHED HIS EMPLOYER...



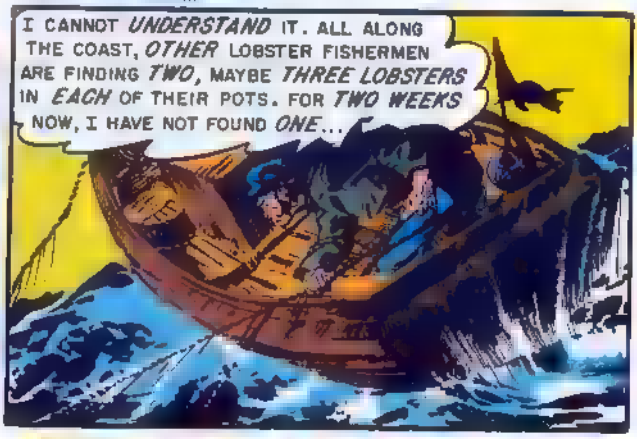
CALVIN'S FACE GREW GRIM AS HE TURNED TO HIS CHEF...





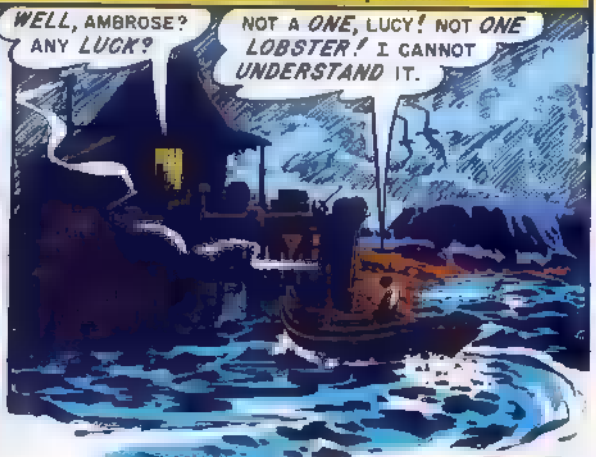
MEANWHILE, AT THAT VERY MOMENT, A FEW MILES UP THE SEACOAST FROM *THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT*, A FISHERMAN GUIDED HIS INBOARD OVER THE TOSSING OCEAN SWELLS TO A CORK FLOAT FROM WHICH FLEW A TATTERED FLAG...

THE FISHERMAN PULLED UP BESIDE THE BOBBING MARKER AND PULLED IT INTO HIS SEA SKIFF. SLOWLY, TEDIOUSLY, HE HAULED IN THE DRIPPING LINE THAT WAS FASTENED TO THE CORK FLOAT...



FINALLY, THE LOBSTER TRAP SURFACED, AND THE FOUL SCENT OF THE FISH HEAD, PLACED WITHIN IT AS BAIT, SEARED THE FISHERMAN'S NOSTRILS...

SADLY, THE FISHERMAN GUIDED HIS INBOARD BACK TO THE BEACH WHERE A WOMAN AND CHILD STOOD IN THE DOORWAY OF A WIND-SCARRED SHACK, WAITING...



THE FISHERMAN ENTERED HIS DINGY SHACK AND SAT DOWN WEARILY...

THE CHILD BEGAN TO CRY...

THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT WAS NOTED FOR ITS BROILED LOBSTER. PEOPLE CAME FROM MILES AROUND TO FEAST ON THE SUCCULENT WHITE MEAT DIPPED IN BUTTER SAUCE. CALVIN DUGAN DID A THRIVING BUSINESS...

THE LOBSTER WAS *ESPECIALLY TASTY* TODAY, MR. DUGAN.

THANK YOU, MR. HINES. GOOD EVENING. COME AGAIN...

AFTER CLOSING TIME THAT NIGHT, JOHN, THE CHEF, REMINDED CALVIN...

WE'RE *GETTING LOW* ON *LOBSTERS,* MR. DUGAN. IF WE HAVE A GOOD CROWD *TOMORROW,* WE'LL *RUN OUT!*

I'LL *PICK SOME UP* THE *MORNING*... ON THE WAY *IN!* GOOD-NIGHT, JOHN.

JOHN NODDED AND LEFT. CALVIN LISTENED AS THE CAR MOTOR ECHOED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT, THEN TURNED TO THE ALMOST EMPTY TUB...

HIDEOUS, DISGUSTING CREATURES!

AFTER A WHILE, CALVIN LEFT THE RESTAURANT. HE LOCKED UP CAREFULLY. BUT HE DID NOT GET INTO HIS CAR. INSTEAD, HE WALKED DOWN TO THE BEACH...

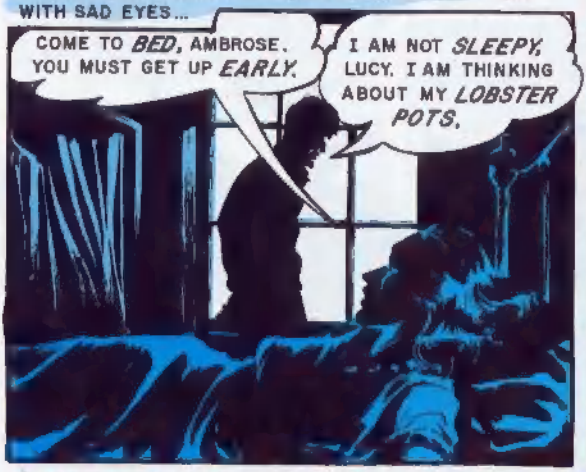
BLAST IT. THERE'S A MOON OUT TONIGHT. WELL, I'LL HAVE TO CHANCE IT.

HE MOVED DOWN THE BEACH TO WHERE A SEA SKIFF WAS MOORED. UNTYING IT, CALVIN PUSHED THE CRAFT INTO THE ONCOMING BREAKERS.

THE INBOARD MOTOR COUGHED AND SPUTTERED, THEN BEGAN TO HUM EVENLY. CALVIN GUIDED THE SKIFF OUT INTO THE OPEN SEA...

A FEW MILES OUT, HE PULLED UP BESIDE A BOBBING MARKER FROM WHICH A TATTERED FLAG FLAPPED...

AMBROSE, THE LOBSTER FISHERMAN, PACED THE FLOOR OF HIS DINGY SHACK. LUCY, HIS WIFE, WATCHED HIM WITH SAD EYES...



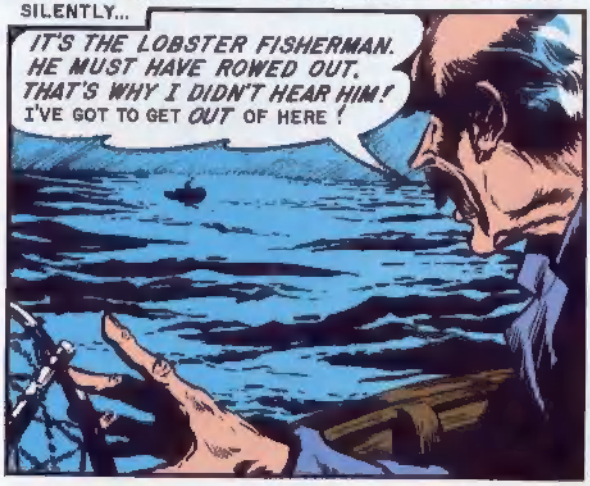
AMBROSE STOPPED PACING. HE LISTENED. FAR AWAY, OVER THE ROAR OF THE SURF POUNDING THE NEARBY BEACH, AMBROSE HEARD A SOUND... A DULL HUMMING SOUND...

AMBROSE POINTED OUT TO SEA... OUT TO THE DISTANT TOSSING SWELLS...

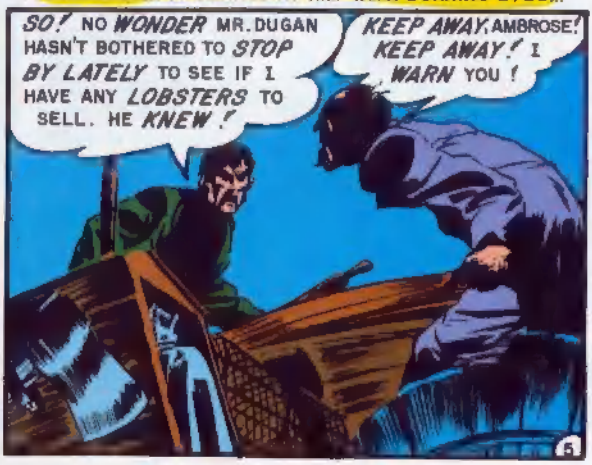
AMBROSE WAS OUT OF THE DOOR OF HIS WEATHER BEATEN SHACK IN A FLASH...

FAR OUT ON THE MOONLIT WAVES, CALVIN DUGAN LIFTED A LOBSTER POT INTO HIS SEA SKIFF...

SUDDENLY CALVIN LOOKED UP. SCARCELY ONE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, ANOTHER SEA SKIFF GLIDED TOWARD HIM SILENTLY...



CALVIN STRUGGLED WITH HIS INBOARD, TRYING TO START IT. THE OTHER SEA SKIFF PULLED ALONGSIDE. THE FISHERMAN IN IT GLARED AT HIM WITH BURNING EYES...



AMBROSE SNARLED...

AMBROSE SCREAMED...

THE KNIFE BLADE IN CALVIN DUGAN'S HAND GLINTED IN THE MOONLIGHT...

AMBROSE'S SHRIEK ECHOED ACROSS THE HEAVING WATER AS CALVIN PLUNGED THE KNIFE INTO HIS WRITHING BODY AGAIN AND AGAIN...

THEN, CALVIN LASHED AMBROSE INTO HIS SEA SKIFF..

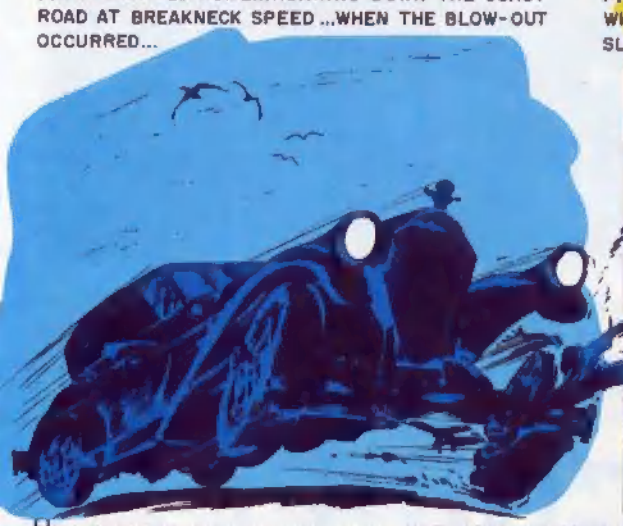
...AND CHOPPED A HOLE IN THE FLOORBOARDS, LETTING THE SEA WATER IN...

SLOWLY, THE BOAT, WITH AMBROSE'S BODY, SANK BELOW THE TOSSING OCEAN WAVES...

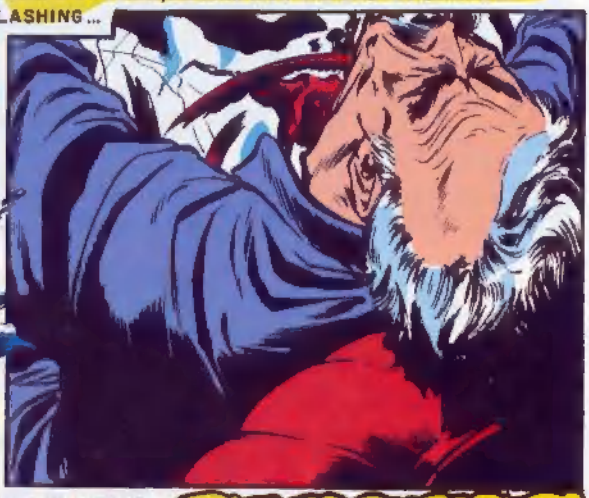
CALVIN STARTED HIS INBOARD AND GUIDED HIS SEA SKIFF BACK TO THE BEACH...

...AND LOADED THE BUTTERTUB WITH THE STOLEN LOBSTERS INTO HIS CAR TRUNK...

HE'D STARTED HOME...ROARING DOWN THE COAST ROAD AT BREAKNECK SPEED...WHEN THE BLOW-OUT OCCURRED...



AS CALVIN'S LURCHING CAR SPUN OVER, THE STEERING WHEEL SHATTERED, RIPPING INTO HIS BODY...TEARING... SLASHING...



HE LAY THERE, PINNED, SQUIRMING, *HIS BODY ALMOST SPLIT IN TWO,* AS THE OVERTURNED CAR CAUGHT FIRE AND THE FLAMES LICKED AT HIM AND *HE SCREAMED AND SHRIEKED AND WAS BROILED ALIVE...*

HEE, HEE! THAT'S MY *STORY,* KIDDIES! *CALVIN ENDED UP* LIKE THE *LOBSTERS* HE'D BEEN *STEALING.* WHEN I *CAME* UPON HIS BURNING CAR, HE WAS *JUST ABOUT DONE.* I WAS *SO MAD.* THERE WASN'T A *DROP* OF *BUTTER SAUCE* AROUND! AND *TALKING* ABOUT *SAUCE,* YOU'D *BUTTER* HURRY UP AND JOIN US *E.C. FAN-ADDICTS!* BUT REMEMBER, MEMBERSHIP IS *LIMITED* TO *250,000,000 PEOPLE.* SO *DON'T LOSE OUT!* GET *BACK ISSUES* OF OUR PERVERTED PERIODICALS AND WRITE TO THE *CREEP-KEEPER* AND LET HIM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF *OUR* BOOK... FOR DETAILS, READ C.K.'S COLUMN!

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